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ANTI-CELEBRATION

February 29, 2016 – 1 p.m.

/ [“Teater v eter”](#)

The performance *If You're Happy* that took place in The Old Power Station last weekend, is the product of collective efforts by the director **Andrej Jus**, dancer and performer **Nataša Živković**, narrators **Ana Duša** and **Špela Frljic**, and musician **Polona Janežič** from the band **Melodrom**. In terms of theatre and content it is not complex nor artistically innovative “masterpiece”; in short, it does not explore new ways of performing. And why should every performance explore them? Above all, *If You're Happy* is a very watchable performance for the format itself. A mixture of fables and concert songs with some inserts by Nataša Živković proves to be a viewer-friendly combination of expressions. In addition, everything is combined into a single-event form of anti-celebration, making the performance easy to consume in one fell swoop.

In the introduction, the artists refer to the recent Prešeren Day celebration. Janez Bogataj, the chairman of the Prešeren Fund Management Board, declared that the censored proposals by the event's director Mare Bulc do not belong to a cultural event, but rather on political rally or in an experimental theatre. What was censored at the state celebration has been shown at the anti-celebration. And it did so without the wire that Bulc wanted to put on stage. Overall performance as a free art form acts as a counterbalance to the precisely defined state protocol. Even more: it is its parody. And if the state celebration made variations on the seventh stanza of Zdravljica, the anti-celebration made variations on children's songs.

In terms of content, the parody was conceived to transcend the mere relation between the state and culture, even though the relation itself is captured mostly in Nataša's howling: “Julianaaaaa, I am

hungry and needy ...” Because culture is not only censored but also more underfunded every year. The anti-celebration as an artistic reaction which comments on the majority of the current crap, an escaped symptom that should not happen as a mirror of the culture to the state. It is a comment on the same-sex act and attitude to the refugees. Quotes from Janša and Cerar are there as well.

As expected, the ensemble proved to be composed of quality performers, each with a wealth of experience in his or her field. The long-time narrators Ana Duša and Špela Frlic are perhaps well accustomed to big stage, but they were just as convincing in their interpretation and expression as Nataša and Polona. After all, they have all proved to be good singers of parody children’s songs, which stay with us in the form of CD instead of the usual theatre playbill. Music by Polona Janežič, performed live on stage with electric piano, has caught this parodic touch of the songs and fables.

Nevertheless, Nataša stood out the most with her very loaded on-stage presence. This was most pronounced in her two solo sequences that took the otherwise parodic form on another level. The grimly caricaturing of a statesman on the recording of Janša’s speech about the Marriage and Family Relations Act established a grim atmosphere that inevitably takes over anyone watching news, for example. Or a state celebration, for that matter. There was a dark flair in the undertone of the humorous, but no less cruel children’s songs and fables for adults. The second solo, with the joint singing of “The Big Black Wolf Is Riding” in the background, intensified the gloomy caricature as Nataša grabbed two ropes herself and began riding the audience as a wanton horseman.

Back to the format. The forms of fables and children’s songs, though adapted to a caricature for adults with a bittering aftertaste, by themselves require simplifying of the current most pressing social tensions. The references and allusions used in the performance are clear and understandable. But with all the moralizing, intellectualizing and philosophizing, with all the protesting and criticizing, with all the bickering about who will say the one most significant thing about the same sex couples, malnourished artists and refugees, it is actually refreshing to see someone entering the artistic scene with a fable for adults, successfully enwrapped in music and some movement. With a fable that does not provoke hearty laughs or trembling howling with laughter, because it is simply not funny, but rather bitterly witty. In view of the irrational simplifications of the right, it proves to be a quite adequate and welcome counterpoint.

Let's conclude with a scenographic coincidence. The stage design was conceived by **Urša Vidic**, a giant tricolour, spread out all across the stage as if hanging from the sky, the tricolour that Mare Bulc was not allowed to use in black and white. A gigantic one, in line with its essential importance (along with culture) for the establishment of state identity. And above it, a deer skull, whose horns are casted a shadow on the whole stage ... a shadow in the form of a giant spider. A spider named racism, whose web will soon be full of global policies.

Attending the anti-celebration instead of the official state celebration was apprentice Maja V.

Authors:

[Andrej Jus](#)

[Nataš Živković](#)

[Ana Duša](#)

[Špela Frlic](#)

[Polona Janežič](#)

[Mare Bulc](#)

[Urša Vidic](#)

[Janez Bogataj](#)